

International Conference Meanings of the Rural – between social representations, consumptions and rural development strategies

28-29 September 2015, University of Aveiro, Portugal

Theme 3

MARKETING CANADA: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF RURAL LANDSCAPES IN CANADIAN TOURISM BROCHURES

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Tourism in Canada is big business. According to the Canadian Tourism Commission (2015: 10), tourism accounted for more than 625,000 jobs across the country and generated over \$85 billion in revenue in 2014. Over \$17 billion came from international travellers making tourism Canada's number one service export. No doubt, before embarking on their trip, millions of visitors peruse provincial tourism websites, travel magazines and brochures to ascertain where exactly they would go and what they would.

How a country promotes and presents itself through advertising is thus critical for attracting visitors; and also this paper argues indicative of the cultural features it most values. Canada is a very large country, so what images of the people, the culture and the place are most prominent in the promotional material produced by each province? How are the characteristics of each province highlighted? And in the process of highlighting particular landscapes and their features, what particular human values are explicitly and implicitly embraced and/or rejected?

This paper employs a comparative case study design to explore the imagery and visual presentation of rural landscapes in Canadian tourism advertising. Specifically it presents a content/critical discourse analysis of the provincial advertising brochures of Canada's ten

provinces and three territories. The paper documents how each province frames space and place and the techniques used to market and attract potential tourists to their places of interest. A detailed study of the images reveals both a complex set of human values and layers of inherent contradictions. First of all, rural settings are often much more prevalent in the tourism literature than urban features but these images are not necessarily reflective of the realities of everyday rural life. For example, the photographs are often idyllic rural vistas void of any people but one or two tourists immersed in the natural setting. Secondly the tourism literature strips the environmental destruction occurring in both urban and rural communities from the scene altogether. Likewise, destructive ‘econoscapes’ emerging in rural Canada — from mega-energy projects, industrial farming and forestry practices — are conveniently absent.

Potential tourists know that the tourism brochures they are pouring over provide a glossy image of their destination, and all tourism literature contains ‘cleansed’ landscapes. Nevertheless, this paper argues that tourism and the cultural landscapes that are valued have an inherent economic value that is seldom acknowledged by other government departments and portfolios. The paper concludes with a larger policy discussion of how conservation, small-scale agriculture and sustainability practices are more in-tune with the agenda of tourism goals than ‘big-business’ economic schema favored by the national and provincial governments economic policies.

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